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ABSTRACT

The Maryland Longitudinal Study (MLS) participants are categorized into one of two categories (preferred or regular admits) based on their academic experiences while at the University of Maryland College Park (UMCP). Preferred admits are students who earned both a high school grade point average (GPA) of "B" or higher and a combined Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) score of 1000 or higher. Regular admits are students who did not meet the criteria for preferred admission and who meet one of several other criteria (high school GPA of greater than "C," combined SAT score of greater than 870, high school GPA greater than or equal to "C" and a combined SAT score greater than or equal to 400, or high school GPA greater than or equal to "D" and a combined SAT score greater than or equal to 790). How students who demonstrate high scholastic aptitude and exceptional high school academic performance fare at UMCP is examined to see if aspects of their academic experience are measurably different from those of the average UMCP student. The academic experience is discussed for the representative group and the black group, focusing on the following topics: demographic foundations; educational expectations, transition from high school to college; faculty/student interaction; self-evaluations; university assessment; and graduation rates from UMCP. Findings indicate the following: a large proportion of students in academic jeopardy did not seek tutoring; a large proportion of preferred admits in their third year at UMCP were showing signs of disengagement with the academic experience; and regardless of aptitude and high school performance, there was a tendency toward unrealistic expectations in students of both groups whose educational goals at the time of their freshman year involved going on to professional school after earning the baccalaureate. Four data tables are included. (SM)

ED 302123



**Maryland
Longitudinal Study**

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

RESEARCH REPORT #10

THE UMCP ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

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Maryland Longitudinal Study Steering Committee
Division of Student Affairs
The University of Maryland College Park
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Students who participated in the Maryland Longitudinal Study (MLS) were classified as either preferred admits or regular admits on the basis of the combination of their SAT scores and high school grade point average, as described in the 1987-88 UMCP Undergraduate Catalog. The academic experience of preferred and regular admits from the study's Representative Group and Black Group was then compared on a number of related variables, as summarized below.

DEMOGRAPHIC FOUNDATIONS

Representative Group

Preferred admits were over-represented by males, were from family backgrounds which tended to have had some degree of higher education experience and had an above-average family income. Regular admits, on the other hand, tended to be women. About one-fifth came from families earning \$20,000 or less; and about one-fifth were first generation college students.

Black Group

In the Black Group, the proportion of males and females in the preferred and regular admit categories was virtually identical. Preferred admits tended to come from families with higher family income categories than those in the regular admit category, and had parents with more exposure to formal education after high school.

EDUCATIONAL EXPECTATIONS

Representative Group

There were no significant differences between preferred and regular admits in terms of when they had decided on an academic major—over 60% had done so while still in high school. Nor were there significant differences in their initial educational aspirations: only 28% of the preferred admits and 33% of the regular admits did *not* have plans to continue their formal education beyond the baccalaureate degree. Over time, students' plans to go to professional school after graduating from UMCP were most vulnerable to change.

Black Group

Among students in the Black Group, regular admits tended to take longer than preferred admits to decide on an academic major: while 63% of preferred admits had chosen their major before their senior year of high school, only 44% of regular admits had done so. The majority of students in the Black Group had high initial educational aspirations: 75% of the preferred admits, and 80% of the regular admits had plans for a degree beyond the baccalaureate degree.

TRANSITION FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE

Representative Group

Beyond similarities in initial feelings about being at UMCP (mostly certain about their choice of UMCP), and in the major sources of financial support (parents), there were some differences. For example, preferred admits were significantly less likely than regular admits to have thought during their freshman year about withdrawing academically from the University.

Black Group

Regular admits were not only more likely than preferred admits to have thought at some point during the freshman year about leaving UMCP, they were also more likely actually to have done so. Black preferred admits, although they persisted at UMCP, perceived lower parental support and employer support for attending UMCP. However, they were also more likely than regular admits to rely heavily on scholarships as a source of their financial support—regular admits relied more on loans.

FACULTY-STUDENT INTERACTION

Representative Group

Preferred admits reported significantly more personal contact with faculty their freshman year, and were more likely than regular admits to have felt encouraged and reinforced by their professors. These differences, however, did not last. By their third year at UMCP, preferred admits were far more critical of the amount of feedback—written and oral—they were receiving from faculty.

Black Group

Preferred admits had a greater tendency than did regular admits to spend time in personal contact with faculty over the years of the study. Nevertheless, there were no significant differences between preferred and regular admits in the proportion who felt that there were faculty who knew them well enough to write a useful letter of recommendation. Further, preferred admits were less positive than regular admits concerning the degree of feedback they received from faculty.

SELF-EVALUATIONS

Representative Group

While preferred admits were more conscientious than regular admits in keeping up with their reading their freshman year, the proportion of preferred admits who fell behind in their reading over time increased. Preferred admits were significantly more likely than regular admits to have had a good academic experience for the first two years. However, by the third year, the proportion of students who were pleased with their academic experience had decreased among preferred admits and increased among regular admits.

Preferred admits were far more likely than regular admits to rank themselves as above average, compared with their peers, on a number of skills involving communication, analysis and synthesis of information, and knowledge and its practical use. However, there were no significant differences between preferred and regular admits on their degree of intellectual development compared to their freshman year. More startling is the finding that there was a greater tendency among preferred admits than regular admits to report that by their third year at UMCP they perceived little or no gains in their attitude and commitment to learning. Nor did preferred admits see much gain in their skills in written expression, compared to regular admits.

Black Group

Preferred admits were far more likely than regular admits to have been pleased with their academic experience their first year, but this tendency lasted only a year. The proportion of preferred admits pleased with their academic experience decreased with time. By the third year, almost half of the preferred admits reported being disappointed academically.

Preferred admits were more likely than regular admits to evaluate themselves on a number of cognitive skills as being above average in comparison with their peers. Despite that, however, they were less likely than regular admits to see developmental gains in their written expression or in their commitment to learning over the three years these variables were studied.

UNIVERSITY ASSESSMENT

Representative Group

Preferred admits had higher grade point averages each semester, less academic action (e.g., probation or dismissal) taken against them for three years, and were less likely than regular admits to have a discrepancy between credit hours attempted and earned, the first two semesters.

A greater proportion of preferred admits persisted at UMCP over time, while a greater proportion of regular admits transferred elsewhere. There were, nevertheless, no significant differences between the two groups in graduation rates from UMCP. By December 1986, 70% of the preferred admits studied and 66% of the regular admits studied had graduated from UMCP; the majority had done so four years after matriculation.

Black Group

For four years, the average GPAs of preferred admits were higher than for regular admits. Further, the discrepancy between credits attempted and earned was higher for regular admits throughout four years. As a result of the first two semesters, a significantly greater proportion of regular admits than preferred admits had academic action taken against them. After the first year, however, the difference between preferred and regular admits on academic probation was no longer statistically significant.

The proportion of preferred admits who persisted at UMCP over time was greater than that of regular admits. Regular admits were more likely than preferred admits to transfer elsewhere. There were significant differences between preferred and regular admits in graduation rates from UMCP. Fifty-eight percent of the preferred admits had graduated from UMCP by December 1986, 61% of those having done so four years after matriculation. Among regular admits, 25% had graduated from UMCP by December 1986, 52% of those four years after matriculation.

The report concludes with a discussion of the findings and implications for the University community.

The Maryland Longitudinal Study (MLS) is a research undertaking of the Division of Student Affairs at The University of Maryland College Park. A significant number of Student Affairs staff have been involved in the study since its inception. A Steering Committee appointed by the Vice President for Student Affairs has been responsible for the methodology, data collection, and management of this project. These individuals are listed in Appendix A of the MLS report entitled "The Maryland Longitudinal Study—A Descriptive Overview: The Study's Purpose, Goals, Features, Participants, and Design."

THE UMCP ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

I. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND

The University of Maryland College Park accepts a diversity of students each year into the entering freshman class. The diversity encompasses demography, ethnicity, educational experience, and ability.

In the selection of students for admission to the degree programs at UMCP, the balance between adhering to higher standards of admission and maintaining diversity becomes an increasingly delicate one beginning with the fall of 1988, the first semester targeted for undergraduate enrollment reduction.

Applicants most likely to be affected by stricter institutional admissions criteria are those whose tested aptitude and high school academic performance are unexceptional. Unexceptional applicants whose financial situation is such that they are not in a position easily to afford the expense of a fulltime college education may be more severely affected.

It is the intention of the present report to categorize Maryland Longitudinal Study (MLS) participants into one of two categories—preferred or regular admits—based on their admissions qualifications, and then to examine their academic experiences while at UMCP. Data gathered through the MLS will be used to examine how students who have demonstrated high scholastic aptitude and exceptional high school academic performance fare at UMCP, and to see if aspects of their academic experience are measurably different from those of UMCP students with less exceptional admissions qualifications.

As is described more fully in MLS Report #1: A DESCRIPTIVE OVERVIEW, participants in MLS form two groups. The Representative Group is a random sample of the entering class of fulltime freshmen in the fall of 1980. The Black Group is comprised of all black students who enrolled as freshmen in the fall of 1980 and who agreed to participate in the study. Because the techniques for identifying the two groups differ, each group will be discussed separately in this report. For each group the discussion will adhere to the outline described below. Differences between preferred and regular admits were statistically significant at least at the .05 level unless otherwise specified.

The first section, entitled Demographic Foundations, describes students' family and high school origins. Preferred and average students will be compared on socio-economic factors and in their high school preparation.

The second section, entitled Educational Expectations, discusses when preferred and regular admits decided on their academic major, and the highest degree they were planning to seek.

The third section explores issues related to these students' transition from high school to college.

The fourth section discusses student/faculty interactions over time. There, and in the two following sections, only the responses of students who persisted at UMCP were included in the analyses. (For a description of the academic experience of students who transfer from UMCP, see MLS Research Report #6: STUDENTS WHO TRANSFER FROM UMCP: DO THEY FIND WHAT THEY ARE LOOKING FOR?)

The fifth section, entitled Self-evaluation, describes preferred and regular admits' self-evaluations of aspects of their cognitive and academic development during their college years.

The sixth section portrays the University's assessment of these students' academic performance, (i.e., their semester grade point average, and academic action, such as being placed on academic probation or being academically dismissed).

The final section is a discussion of graduation rates for preferred and regular admits in both the Representative and Black Groups.

This report concludes with a discussion of the findings and implications for the University community.

B. DEFINITIONS USED IN THIS REPORT

For the purposes of analysis, students were categorized into one of two subgroups according to the following definitions:

PREFERRED ADMITS: students who earned *both* a high school grade point average of 'B' or higher *and* a combined SAT score of 1000 or higher (as described in the 1987-88 UMCP Undergraduate Catalog).

REGULAR ADMITS: students who did not meet the criteria for preferred admission *and* who met *one* of the criteria (taken from the UMCP Undergraduate Catalog for the year in which they matriculated) listed below:

- a high school grade point average of greater than 'C';
- a combined SAT score greater than 870;
- a high school grade point average greater than or equal to 'C' *and* a combined SAT score greater than or equal to 400;
- a high school grade point average greater than or equal to 'D' *and* a combined SAT score greater than or equal to 790.

Students who did not meet the criteria for either preferred admission or regular admission (and were admitted through individual admission procedures), or for whom criterion data were missing, were not included in the analyses for the present report. This was true of 7 participants in the Representative Group and 26 participants in the Black Group.

II. THE ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

A. DEMOGRAPHIC FOUNDATIONS: REPRESENTATIVE GROUP

Sex ratio

Among the 223 males in the Representative Group included in the analyses for the present report, 92, or 41% were classified as preferred admits according to the criteria described above; 131 males, or 59% were classified as regular admits. There were fewer preferred admits among females, where of the 238 females included in these analyses, 69, or 29% were classified as preferred admits; 161 females, or 71% were classified as regular admits. Thus, males outnumbered females in the preferred admit category, and females outnumbered males in the regular admit category.

Scholastic aptitude

Among preferred and regular admits, the average SAT Math score was higher than the Verbal score. The average SAT score for preferred admits was 603 for Math and 537 for Verbal. Among regular admits, the average SAT score was 460 for Math and 408 for Verbal.

High school academic performance

By definition, preferred admits had high school grade point averages of B or better. Forty-nine percent earned an A or A-, and 51%, a B or B+.

Sixteen percent of the regular admits earned an A or A- average in high school. Another 48% earned a B or B+. Thirty-five percent had high school grade point averages below B.

High school curriculum

Of the 85% preferred admits who graduated from a public high school, 70% reported they had been enrolled in an academic curriculum, 15% in a general curriculum¹, and none in a commercial curriculum. The remaining 15% had been enrolled in either a private or a parochial high school—the type of curriculum was unspecified, but presumed to be academic.

In contrast, of the 84% regular admits who graduated from a public high school, 54% reported they had been enrolled in an academic curriculum, 27% reported they had been enrolled in a general curriculum¹, and 3% had been enrolled in a commercial curriculum. The remaining 16% had been enrolled in either a parochial or a private high school.

High school study habits

Despite the differences in their high school curriculum, there were no statistically significant differences between regular and preferred admits in study habits during high school. However, there was a trend indicating that regular admits were more conscientious in high school than preferred admits about both completing and turning in their assignments on time.

Family background

Preferred admits came from somewhat more privileged family backgrounds than regular admits. There were significantly more students whose parents *both* had college experience among preferred admits (61%) than among regular admits (48%). Furthermore, only 14% of the preferred admits had parents with *no* college experience, and could therefore be classified as first generation college students. This contrasts with 20% of first generation college students found among regular admits.

There were more families earning \$20,000 or less among regular admits (18%) than among preferred admits (8%). However, the differences in average family income between preferred and regular admits were not statistically significant.

B. EDUCATIONAL EXPECTATIONS: REPRESENTATIVE GROUP

When decided on academic major

Preferred and regular admits did not significantly dif-

fer in terms of when they first decided on their academic major. Over 60% had made that decision while still in high school—the majority of those, before their senior year in high school. Another 15% decided at some point during their freshman year at UMCP. Approximately 20% had not yet decided on their major by the spring of their freshman year.

Educational expectations

There were no significant differences in the educational aspirations of preferred and regular admits as of the spring semester of their freshman year. Only one-fourth of the preferred admits planned not to pursue a degree beyond the baccalaureate degree. Forty-two percent planned to go to graduate school, and 29% planned to earn a professional degree. The remaining 3% responded that they did not yet know their future educational plans.

Among regular admits, 30% reported aiming for a baccalaureate degree, 33% planned to go to graduate school, and 33% planned to seek a professional degree. The proportion of regular admits who had not yet decided their educational plans was 3%.

An examination of the grade point averages of students with differing educational aspirations indicates that students aspiring to go to professional school after earning their baccalaureate earned the lowest grades during the freshman year. After the first year, their grade point average improved but was still lower than for students aspiring to go on to graduate school.

Interestingly, when asked toward the end of their second year of studies about their educational aspirations, a different pattern emerged among UMCP persisters. The proportion of preferred admits whose highest degree sought was the baccalaureate degree increased from 25% to 37%; the proportion planning to go to graduate school increased from 42% to 49%, and the proportion planning to pursue a professional degree decreased from 29% to 13%.

Among regular admits who persisted at UMCP, the proportion who wanted only their baccalaureate degree increased from 30% to 46%. The proportion who planned to go to graduate school rose from 33% to 46%. The proportion who wanted a professional degree plunged from 33% to 7%.

For both preferred and regular admits, then, plans to go on to professional school after graduation from UMCP were most vulnerable to change over time.

C. TRANSITION FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE: REPRESENTATIVE GROUP

Initial feelings

Preferred and regular admits did not differ significantly in their initial feelings about being at UMCP. Approximately two-thirds of the students in each category had certain (as opposed to mixed) feelings about coming to the University of Maryland. Adjusting to academics was reported by 34% of the students studied as being the most salient issue during their transition from high school to college. Being on one's own was a slightly more salient issue among preferred admits, and interpersonal issues were slightly more prevalent among regular admits.

Advice to incoming freshmen

Both groups felt the best single piece of advice they would give to an incoming freshman, based on their own experience, would be related to study habits (e.g., study hard, organize time, keep up with reading assignments, etc.).

Residence during the freshman year

There were no differences between students in the two admit categories in the proportion who lived on campus as opposed to commuting to classes their freshman year. Fifty-five percent of both preferred and regular admits lived on campus.

First semester social life

Preferred and regular admits did not differ in their assessment of their social life their first semester at UMCP. Only 28% of the students studied felt their social life had been worse than expected.

Financial concern

Only 8% of each group reported they had no financial concerns their freshman year. There were no significant differences between them on the major sources of financial support. Sixty-eight percent of each group relied heavily on their parents, approximately 28% on loans or grants, 16% on scholarships, and 20% on their personal savings or income. (These sources were not mutually exclusive; rather, there was overlap across sources of financial support.)

Employment

Forty-five percent of preferred admits were employed during their freshman year, 38% part-time (up to 20 hours a week), and 7% fulltime. This pattern is similar to that seen with regular admits, where 42% were employed, 32% part-time and 10% fulltime.

Support for being a UMCP student

Most of the employed students in each group reported their employers were encouraging of their being a student at UMCP. Parents, too, were seen as encouraging.

Recommend UMCP?

Toward the end of their first year at UMCP a large majority of students in each group (97%) reported that it was likely they would encourage a friend or relative to attend UMCP.

Use of tutoring services

There were no statistically significant differences in the proportion of preferred (23%) and regular (28%) admits who reported having used tutoring services their freshman year. Nor were there differences among students in the Representative Group, regardless of admissions qualifications, when one looks at use of tutoring services by the type of learning style the student identified as his or hers (for a discussion of students' learning style see section E. Self-evaluations).

However, when one looks only at students who were placed on probation as a result of their first semester ($n=63$), preferred admits on probation were significantly more likely (71%) than regular admits on probation (25%) to report having sought tutoring during the freshman year.

Commitment to UMCP

Preferred admits felt in their freshman year that UMCP was satisfying their expectations: 60% reported they never thought of academically withdrawing from college *during the year*, as compared with 44% of the regular admits—a statistically significant difference. There was no such significant difference between the two groups in terms of how often they thought about leaving UMCP *after the end of their first year*. Fifty-eight percent of preferred admits and 48% of regular admits reported never having thought of doing so.

D. FACULTY-STUDENT INTERACTION: REPRESENTATIVE GROUP

Faculty feedback

There were no differences between preferred and regular admits on the amount of inspiration to do better work they felt from faculty their freshman year: 58% of preferred admits and 50% of regular admits reported they felt at least some inspiration. Nor were there significant differences between preferred and regular admits on the degree faculty helped them understand their own weaknesses, although preferred admits were slightly more likely (77%) than regular admits (69%) to report such feedback. Preferred admits were also more likely (78%) than regular admits (69%) to have felt their professors helped them understand their own strengths to some degree. Preferred and regular admits differed in reporting that a professor had helped them feel their field of study was extremely important (80% of the preferred admits reported this had happened, compared to 68% of the regular admits).

Preferred and regular admits were similar in their assessment of how much written feedback they had received from their professors their freshman year. Just over half (54%) of the students studied reported receiving some written feedback. Similarly, they agreed on the degree of oral feedback they received from their professors their freshman year, with approximately 32% reporting some feedback.

In their second year, again, there were no significant differences between preferred and regular admits on the degree of written and oral feedback received from their professors. The proportion reporting having received some feedback increased to 58% for written feedback, and 65% for oral feedback.

By their third year, regular admits were significantly more likely (60%) than preferred admits (41%) to report having received some written feedback from their professors, and while regular admits were also more likely to report having received some oral feedback (51%) than preferred admits (45%), that difference is not statistically significant.

Degree of caring for students

Preferred and regular admits were similar in their agreement with the statement that instructors and faculty advisors cared about students. The proportion of students who felt their instructors cared increased from 66% in their freshman year to 70% in their second year, and to 75% in their third year. The proportion agreeing that their faculty advisor(s) seemed to care about students increased from 77% in their freshman year to 80% in years two and three.

Amount of personal contact with faculty

The two groups differed significantly in the amount of personal contact they had with faculty during their freshman year. Preferred admits were initially more likely (75%) than regular admits (61%) to report having had some outside the classroom contact with a professor. Most, however, had spent less than one hour in such contact over the freshman year. Preferred and regular admits did not differ significantly in the number of faculty they had gotten to know personally their freshman year: half responded none, another quarter knew one, and the remaining quarter responded they knew more than one faculty member personally. When asked if they thought there were faculty members who knew them well enough to write them a useful letter of recommendation, approximately 17% of the students studied thought so, 14% were neutral, and 69% did not think so.

The differences in amount of personal contact with faculty between preferred and regular admits did not last. By the second year of the study, similar proportions of preferred and regular admits (73%) reported personal contact with faculty outside the classroom. About one-third had spent less than an hour in such contact over the year, one-third had spent between one and three hours, and one-third, over three hours. Approximately 55% of each group said they had a personal relationship with a faculty member, and approximately 43% claimed there was a faculty member who knew them well enough to write them a useful letter of recommendation.

By the third year of the study, students in the two admit categories did not differ in the amount of personal contact with faculty in the third year of the study (with approximately 85% of each category reporting having spent some time in such contact). Further, 58% of the preferred admits and 42% of the regular admits reported having gotten to know at least one faculty member personally. **One-half of the preferred admits and 59% of the regular admits felt there was a faculty member at UMCP who knew them well enough to write them a useful letter of recommendation, three years after matriculation.**

E. SELF-EVALUATIONS: REPRESENTATIVE GROUP

Fears and difficulties in the freshman year

Regular admits reported having experienced the fear that they had failed an exam their freshman year significantly more often (31%) than did preferred admits (15%). Preferred admits were significantly less likely than regular admits to report having had difficulty on essay tests or objective tests their freshman year, and nonsignificantly less likely than regular admits to have had difficulty writing term papers. However, reported feelings of self-confidence levels were similar for the two groups, as was the frequency of their feelings of depression. Approximately 15% reported they often felt depressed their freshman year; 10% rarely or never felt self-confident.

Study habits

While a slightly greater proportion of regular admits had reported conscientious study habits in high school,

significantly more preferred admits reported keeping up with their reading assignments during their freshman year at UMCP. Only five percent of the preferred admits and 13% of the regular admits claimed they were *always behind* in their assignments. However, **the proportion of UMCP persisters who reported falling behind in their studies increased the next year to 18% of preferred admits and 15% of regular admits, and to 42% of preferred and regular admits the third year, an indication that, by themselves, exceptional aptitude and high school academic performance are not good predictors of performance in keeping up with college assignments.**

Academic performance

Preferred admits were significantly more likely (50%) than regular admits (31%) to have felt they had done better academically than they had expected their freshman year. Nineteen percent of both preferred and regular admits reported that their academic experience had been about as expected. Thirty percent of preferred admits and 49% of regular admits reported having done less well than expected.

In their evaluations of their second academic year at UMCP, preferred admits were again significantly more likely (62%) than regular admits (41%) to report that they had had a good academic year; and conversely, regular admits were more likely (44%) than preferred admits (20%) not to have done as well as they had expected.

In their third year, the proportion of students who were pleased with their academic performance decreased for preferred admits (to 57%) and increased for regular admits (to 52%), while the proportion of preferred admits who were disappointed with how things had gone academically remained fairly steady (23%), and decreased among regular admits (to 33%).

Cognitive ability

Students were asked at the end of each of the first three years of the study to indicate where they would rate themselves in relation to their college classmates who also matriculated at UMCP in the fall of 1980, on the following variables:

- their ability to write clearly, correctly and effectively;
- their ability to speak clearly, correctly and effectively;
- their ability to break information into basic elements;
- their ability to make personal interpretations of information;
- their ability to make quantitative and qualitative judgments about the value of information, materials, and methods;
- their ability to arrange and combine elements so that new patterns appear;
- their knowledge of information, theories, generalizations, methods of inquiry, and criteria for judgment; and
- their ability to use theory in practical activities.

Given the size both of the UMCP campus and of many classes, what these questions were measuring may be related less to cognitive ability than to self-esteem. Nevertheless, with this limitation in mind, analyses show that on nearly every variable of cognitive ability listed above, preferred admits rated themselves significantly more positively than regular admits *every year*. The one exception was the ability to speak clearly, correctly, and effectively, where the significant differences between preferred and regular admits disappeared after the freshman year.

Intellectual development

UMCP persisters were also asked during the first three years of the study to indicate how much change they thought there had been in their intellectual development from the time of their matriculation at UMCP. For three years, there was no statistical evidence that preferred admits were more likely than regular admits to perceive gains in the development of their academic skills and abilities.

Commitment to learning

Among UMCP persisters, preferred and regular admits' self-evaluation of development in their attitude, style, and commitment to learning showed no significant differences during their first two years of study. In the third year, however, while significantly more preferred admits (16%) than regular admits (8%) reported substantial gains in their commitment to learning, the proportion of students who reported only slight gains (i.e. "little" or "some" gain) was significantly higher for preferred admits (43%) than for regular admits (31%).

Written expression

This finding was repeated in the evaluation by UMCP persisters of their development in written expression. In the third year, a significantly greater proportion of regular admits (41%) than preferred admits (26%) saw much gain in their ability to write compared to their freshman year.

Learning style

Diversity in an undergraduate population implies, among other things, diversity of learning style. MLS participants were asked in the third year of the study to indicate which of several learning styles most closely described their own. To see if particular learning styles were related to aptitude and high school academic performance, the responses of preferred and regular admits were examined. There were no significant differences found in their preferred learning styles. Approximately 30% in each admit category indicated they liked to study alone, with self-relevant material. Approximately 33% preferred highly structured courses. Seventeen percent reported they responded best to collaborative learning where they shared ideas with others and got involved in class activities, and 18% described themselves as competitive learners. The remaining students ($n=2$) reported none of the learning styles described them because they felt generally turned off as a student and didn't care to work with teachers or other students.

F. UNIVERSITY ASSESSMENT: REPRESENTATIVE GROUP

Grade point averages

For the five years in which grade point averages were studied, semester grade point averages for preferred admits were significantly higher than for regular admits. However, the gap between the two groups grew narrower over time. As a group, preferred admits' average semester GPA had a range over five years of between 2.76 and 2.87. Regular admits' average semester GPA rose steadily from 2.12 their first semester, to 2.56 in their spring semester of the fifth year.

Academic action

Preferred admits were significantly less likely than regular admits to have had academic action (e.g. being placed on academic probation or being academically dismissed) taken against them (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
Proportion of Representative Group
With Academic Action Taken by Semester

	Preferred Admits	Regular Admits
Fall 1980		
probation	4	20
dismissal	—	—
Spring 1981		
probation	8	17
dismissal	1	10
Fall 1981		
probation	8	18
dismissal	3	8
Spring 1982		
probation	8	15
dismissal	3	6
Fall 1982		
probation	8	14
dismissal	2	7
Spring 1983		
probation	6	9
dismissal	5	4
Fall 1983		
probation	7	13
dismissal	3	3
Spring 1984		
probation	8	6
dismissal	2	6

As can be seen in Table 1, as a result of their first semester at UMCP, 4% of preferred admits and 20% of regular admits were placed on academic probation. For the next three semesters, approximately 10% of preferred admits and 25% of regular admits had some kind of academic action taken against them. By the sixth semester after matriculation, however, these differences between the two admit categories had disappeared.

Discrepancy between credit hours attempted and earned

Concerning a discrepancy between credit hours attempted and earned, there were significant differences between the two groups only for the first year, during which a greater proportion of regular admits (26%) than preferred admits (10%) attempted more credits than they earned. After the freshman year, however, the two groups were similar on this variable.

Enrollment Patterns

In longitudinal research, the problem of losing data through participant attrition increases with time. When one of the issues being investigated is the academic experience of students, some of the lost data can be recovered through institutional data sets. One such piece of recoverable data is enrollment status with the matriculating institution — in this case, UMCP.

While it is not possible to know the enrollment status in higher education generally (i.e., transferred to another institution or discontinued enrollment in higher education) of study participants who subsequently became nonparticipants, it is possible to trace the yearly enrollment status of the study's subsequent nonparticipants.

The following information, therefore, is a blend of self-reported data and institutionally-derived data. There are no UMCP persisters included among participants categorized as "enrollment status unknown." That category consists of initial study participants who left the study and who left the University of Maryland (and hence were not tracked either as part of MLS or in the institutional data set). The table below shows the yearly enrollment status (as of the time of each spring's data collection period) of preferred and regular admits in the Representative Group.

Acknowledging the probable inflation of the proportions of transfers and non-students if the enrollment status of subjects categorized as "enrollment status unknown" could be ascertained, there nevertheless seem to be differential patterns of enrollment for preferred admits and regular admits across the years of the study. A greater proportion of preferred admits persisted at UMCP; a greater proportion of regular admits transferred elsewhere. The enrollment status with no distinct difference between preferred and regular admits was "not enrolled in higher education."

G. GRADUATION RATES FROM UMCP: REPRESENTATIVE GROUP

Given the differences between preferred and regular admits in credit loss and grade point averages, is the graduation rate from UMCP for preferred admits significantly higher than for regular admits? Somewhat surprisingly, the answer is no. **By December of 1986, 70% of the preferred admits and 66% of the regular admits had graduated from UMCP.** Nor were there significant differences between them in the length of time taken to earn their degrees. Of those who had graduated from UMCP by December 1986, approximately 63% in each group did so four years after matriculation, approximately 28% took five years, and approximately 9% took 6 years.

TABLE 2
Enrollment Patterns*
of Preferred Admits and Regular Admits
in the Representative Group
(in percentages)

	1982		1983		1984		1985	
	Preferred Admit	Regular Admit	Preferred Admit	Regular Admit	Preferred Admit	Regular Admit	Preferred Admit	Regular Admit
UMCP Persister/Grad	86	73	78	61	75	61	66	51
Transferred elsewhere	9	13	10	17	12	14	9	10
Not enrolled in higher education	5	7	7	9	8	11	6	11
Enrollment status unknown	0	7	5	12	5	14	19	28

*as of the spring semester data collection, which was prior to that year's May graduation.

THE BLACK GROUP

The preceding section of this report was devoted to a discussion of the academic experience of students in the Representative Group. The present section will examine the academic experience of students in the Black Group. (Recall that the Black Group is comprised of all the black students matriculating at UMCP in the fall of 1980 who agreed to participate in the study.) As with students in the Representative Group, Black Group students were placed into one of two categories—preferred admits and regular admits. This was done on the basis of the combination of their SAT scores and their high school grade average (see page 4 for the definitional criteria for the two categories).

A. DEMOGRAPHIC FOUNDATIONS: BLACK GROUP

Sex ratio

The proportion of preferred and regular admits among males and females in the Black Group was virtually identical. Among the 109 black males included in the analyses for the present report, 10, or 9%, were classified as preferred admits; 99, or 91%, were classified as regular admits. Among the 204 black females included in these analyses, 21, or 10%, were classified as preferred admits; 183, or 90%, were classified as regular admits.

Scholastic aptitude

Both groups showed higher math than verbal aptitude. Average SAT scores among preferred admits were 561 for Math and 536 for Verbal. Among regular admits, average SAT scores were 391 for Math and 369 for Verbal.

High school academic performance

By definition, preferred admits had a high school grade average of B or higher. Thirty-six percent earned an A or A— average, and 64% a B or B+. Among regular admits, 9% earned an A or A—, 53% earned a B or B+, and 38% earned below a B.

High school curriculum

Seventy-four percent of the preferred admits graduated from a public high school. Of those, 71% reported they had been enrolled in an academic curriculum, another 3% from a general curriculum.¹ None had been enrolled in a commercial curriculum. Further, 16% graduated from a parochial high school, 6% from private school, and 3% from something other than these categories.

In contrast, among the 83% regular admits who graduated from a public high school, 58% reported they had been enrolled in an academic curriculum, 20% in a general curriculum,¹ and 5% in a commercial curriculum. Ten percent graduated from parochial high school, 5% from a private school, and 2% from some other type of secondary schooling.

High school study habits

There were no significant differences between preferred admits and regular admits in study habits generally considered conducive to good academic performance: completing homework assignments on time and turning assignments in on time. Over 90% in each category reported they usually or always did so during high school.

Family background

There were more students with both parents having had at least some college experience among preferred admits: 63%, as compared to 40% among regular admits. And there were more first generation college students among regular admits (32%) than among preferred admits (23%). These findings suggest that preferred admits were more likely than regular admits to have come from a family background which had experienced and were therefore to some degree familiar with the norms and expectations of higher education.

It is unfortunate that there was a large amount of missing data on the question concerning estimated family income. Eleven of 31 preferred admits (35%), and 54 of 282 regular admits (19%) did not respond. Among those who responded, however, the following observations can be made: 23% of preferred admits in the Black Group reported parent income of \$20,000 or less, compared to 39% of the regular admits. Approximately the same proportions in each category reported family income between \$20,001 and \$40,000. The income categories over \$40,000 were significantly more heavily represented by preferred admits (30%) than by regular admits (19%).

B. EDUCATIONAL EXPECTATIONS: BLACK GROUP

When decided on academic major

Ninety percent of preferred admits had decided on their college major before matriculation at UMCP. Of those, just under two-thirds (63%) of preferred admits had decided before their senior year of high school, while another 27% made that decision their senior year. The remaining 10% had not yet decided on their academic major as of the spring of their freshman year.

Regular admits tended to take a little longer to decide on their academic major. Seventy-four percent had made that decision before matriculating at UMCP. Of those, 44% had decided before their senior year in high school. Thirty percent made the decision during their senior year in high school. Ten percent decided on their academic major during their freshman year at UMCP. Fifteen percent were still undecided about their major in the spring semester of their freshman year.

Educational expectations

The majority of students in the Black Group had high educational expectations when they entered UMCP. Only 23% of the preferred admits and 16% of the regular admits planned to stop their formal education at the baccalaureate level. Indeed, more than half of the preferred admits (55%) and just under half of the regular admits (48%) had plans to earn a professional degree. Another 20 percent of the preferred admits and 32% of the regular admits planned to go on to graduate school. The remaining 2% preferred admits and 4% regular admits did not yet know their future educational plans.

However, the freshman year proved to be a year of reality testing of these students' educational aspirations: **doctoral and professional degree aspirants had lower grade point averages their freshman year than did students planning to earn a baccalaureate or master's degree.** After the first year, the grades of students aspiring to a degree beyond a master's degree were closer to the admissions requirements of graduate and professional schools.

Looking only at students who persisted at UMCP for their second and third years of study (as opposed to those who transferred elsewhere or who left higher education), for both preferred and regular admits the proportion who planned to stop their formal education at the baccalaureate level decreased slightly over time, as did the proportion planning to earn a doctorate. The proportion seeking a master's degree increased. Among preferred admits, the proportion planning to go on to professional school remained the same (13%). Among regular admits, the proportion decreased slightly (from 7% to 5%).

C. TRANSITION FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE: BLACK GROUP

Initial feelings

There were no significant differences in students' reports of their initial feelings about being at UMCP, although preferred admits had a somewhat greater tendency (42%) than regular admits (35%) to have experienced mixed—as opposed to certain—feelings. Forty-eight percent of preferred admits and 42% of regular admits claimed that adjusting to academics was the most difficult part of the transition from high school to the University. Approximately 20% of each admit category had troubles being on their own. Regular admits were more likely (18%) than preferred admits (10%) to have found interpersonal adjustments difficult during the transition.

Advice to incoming freshmen

The best piece of advice the students studied would give to an incoming freshman, based on their own freshman year experience, was related to study habits (e.g., study hard, organize time, keeping up with reading assignments, etc.).

Residence during the freshman year

Eighty-seven percent of the preferred admits and 70% of the regular admits lived on campus their freshman year.

First semester social life

There were no significant differences between preferred and regular admits on their assessment of their first semester social life. Just over half felt it had been better than they had expected. About one-quarter felt it had been about as they had expected. The remainder felt it had not been as good as they had expected.

Financial concern

For a very small minority of black students, the costs of higher education were of only minimal concern to them: 6% among preferred admits and 4% among regular admits. Thirty-two percent of preferred admits and 53% of regular admits reported relying on their parents as a major source of financial support. There was a heavy reliance on scholarships for some degree of financial support (87% of preferred admits and 70% of regular admits). Forty-five percent of preferred admits and 54% of regular admits had taken loans to cover some of their educational expenses. Recall that there was overlap across sources of financial support.

Employment

Preferred admits were somewhat more likely (68%) than regular admits (57%) to have contributed toward their educational expenses from their own wages or savings their freshman year. However, they were less likely (26%) than regular admits (46%) to be employed during their freshman year. Of those students who were employed, half (50%) of the preferred admits and 15% of the regular admits worked more than 20 hours a week.

Support for being a UMCP student

Interestingly, regular admits (63%) perceived their parents as more supportive of their being a student at UMCP than did preferred admits (53%). And of those students who were employed, preferred admits perceived far more neutrality among their employers (60%) about their being a UMCP student than did regular admits (30%).

Recommend UMCP?

Toward the end of their first year at UMCP, more regular admits (74%) than preferred admits (68%) indicated they would be inclined to encourage a college-bound friend or relative to attend UMCP.

Use of tutoring services

While the differences are not statistically significant, regular admits were more likely (40%) than preferred admits (27%) to have used tutoring services their freshman year. Further, **of the black students studied who were put on academic probation as a result of their first semester at UMCP (n = 98), 33% of preferred admits on probation and 42% of regular admits on probation reported having sought tutoring their freshman year.**

Setting aside the categories of "preferred" and "regular" admit for a moment and looking at black students' learning style as it relates to use of tutoring services shows that students whose self-identified learning style is one which prefers highly structured courses and focuses on the learning which is required are significantly more likely to report having sought tutoring services than students with other learning styles. (For a discussion of students' learning styles, see section E. Self-evaluations.)

Commitment to UMCP

In general, students in the Black Group reported they did not entertain thoughts about leaving UMCP during the school year. Less than one-quarter of students in each category indicated they had considered *leaving before the end of the year*. Twenty percent of preferred admits reported having had thoughts about *leaving UMCP after the end of the second semester*, while 40% of the regular admits indicated that they had considered doing so.

D. FACULTY-STUDENT INTERACTION: BLACK GROUP

Faculty feedback

Regular admits (57%) were more positive than preferred admits (42%) concerning the amount of inspiration to do better work they had felt from their instructors their first year. Regular admits were also more likely (43%) than preferred admits (36%) to have felt that their professor helped them understand their strengths. Students in the two admit categories were similar in their assessment of feedback from professors concerning students' weaknesses—just under half reported they had received such feedback. And about half of the students studied felt their professors helped them feel their field of study was important.

Fifty-two percent of both preferred and regular admits reported they had received some written feedback from their professors their freshman year. Approximately 37% reported having received some oral feedback. In their second year, 52% of preferred admits and 56% of regular admits reported having received written feedback. However, in terms of oral feedback, regular admits were significantly more likely (51%) than preferred admits (14%) to report having received such feedback. No significant differences appeared between preferred and regular admits in year three on the amount of written or oral feedback received from faculty.

Degree of caring for students

During their freshman year, regular admits were slightly more likely to agree that their instructors acted as if they cared for students. Sixty-one percent of preferred admits and 72% of regular admits agreed that their instructors cared for students. When asked about caring for students on the part of faculty advisors, 87% preferred admits and 82% regular admits agreed or were neutral on the question.

In their second and third years there were no significant differences between preferred and regular admits on the question of instructors' caring for students, with approximately two-thirds agreeing or being neutral on the question. Nor were there differences between preferred and regular admits on the question of faculty advisors' caring for students, with approximately 80% agreeing or being neutral.

Amount of personal contact with faculty

While preferred admits were more likely than were regular admits to have spent time in personal contact with a faculty member during their freshman year (16% of preferred admits and 32% of regular admits reported having spent *no* time in personal contact with faculty), there were no significant differences in the amount of time so spent. Most had spent less than one hour with a faculty member outside the classroom during their first year. Not many students studied (16% preferred admits and 18% regular admits) felt they knew a faculty member well enough to ask for a letter of recommendation.

In the second year of the study, however, there was a reduction in the proportion of preferred admits who reported having spent some time with faculty outside the classroom (from 84% to 71%), and a slight increase in the proportion of regular admits (68% to 74%) having done so. Once again, there were no differences in the amount of time spent in this type of contact. Of those who had such contact, about 30% had spent less than

one hour, 50% had spent between one and three hours, and 20%, more than three hours in personal contact with faculty their second year at UMCP. Over 80% of the students studied felt there was a faculty member who knew them well enough to write them a letter of recommendation.

By the third year, among regular admits, 44% were still reporting little or no personal contact with faculty, whereas three-quarters of the preferred admits not only were reporting spending personal time with faculty, the amount of time spent in such contact had increased. Two-thirds of the students studied felt a faculty member knew them well enough to write them a letter of recommendation.

E. SELF-EVALUATIONS: BLACK GROUP

Fears and difficulties in the freshman year

Having high scholastic aptitude and exceptional high school academic performance did not preclude the fear of having failed an exam. Students in both categories reported having had that fear at least sometimes during the freshman year. As might be expected, preferred admits found it far less difficult (30%) than did regular admits (66%) to show their knowledge on essay tests. Interestingly, this lack of difficulty with essay tests did not carry over to term papers. Preferred and regular admits were alike in reporting having had some difficulty in this area. Nor were there significant differences reported in the amount of difficulty with objective tests. The majority of preferred and regular admits reported experiencing little or no such difficulty.

Interestingly, it is the preferred admits who had a greater tendency to report low feelings of self-confidence their freshman year. Indeed, 19% of the preferred admits indicated they rarely or never felt self-confident. This compares with 9% of regular admits. One-quarter of the preferred admits and 36% of the regular admits reported rarely or never feeling depressed their freshman year, a nonsignificant difference.

Study habits

Preferred admits were more likely (55%) than regular admits (34%) to keep up with their reading assignments their freshman year. In the second year of their studies, however, the proportion of preferred admits at UMCP who were able to keep up with their reading decreased (to 35%) while the proportion of regular admits remained almost the same (32%). By the third year, 31% of regular admits were able to keep up with their reading assignments, while the proportion of preferred admits doing so had decreased to 23%.

Academic performance

Preferred admits were far more likely than regular admits to have been pleased with their first academic semester at UMCP: 48%, as compared with 18% among regular admits, felt they had done better than they had expected. There were no significant differences between preferred and regular admits in how they evaluated their second year's academic experience. However, more preferred admits (48%) than regular admits (36%) felt that it had been better than they had expected. While again there were no statistically significant differences between preferred and regular admits in the evaluation of their third academic year at UMCP, almost half (48%) of the preferred admits reported disappointment with their academic experience. This compares with 30% among regular admits.

Cognitive ability

When evaluating themselves in comparison to their fellow classmates on a number of skills involving communication, the analysis, interpretation, and synthesis of information, and knowledge and its practical application, preferred admits were more likely than regular admits to perceive themselves as above average in comparison to their classmates, particularly in skills pertaining to writing, and in analyzing information. In addition, regular admits who persisted at UMCP were slower to see advances in some of their cognitive skills—particularly their knowledge of information, and their ability to apply it. However, by the third year of their studies, their evaluations of those skills did not differ significantly from preferred admits.

Intellectual development

UMCP persisters were asked during the first three years to indicate how much change they thought there had been in their intellectual development from the time of their matriculation at UMCP. For three years, there were no statistical differences between preferred and regular admits in the amount of development of their academic skills and abilities.

Commitment to learning

Interestingly, when asked to evaluate themselves on gains in their commitment to learning from when they matriculated at UMCP, there were no significant differences between preferred admits and regular admits during the first two years. However, in the third year of their studies, preferred admits at UMCP were significantly more critical than regular admits of their gains in their commitment to learning. **Forty-three percent of preferred admits reported they perceived slight gains (i.e. "little" or "some" gain) since matriculation, compared to 31% of regular admits. Conversely, 17% of regular admits saw significant gains, compared to 5% preferred admits.**

Written expression

While 45% of regular admits persisting at UMCP a second year saw substantial gains in their written expression compared to how they were as matriculating freshmen, *none* of the preferred admits saw substantial gains. By their third year of study here, while there were still more preferred admits (19%) than regular admits (10%) who saw little or no gains in their written expression, the differences were no longer statistically significant.

Learning style

To see if there were differences between the two groups in learning style, third year students were asked to identify which of five learning styles was most descriptive of their own. There were no significant differences between preferred and regular admits. Fourteen percent of each identified competitive learning, and 24% identified cooperative learning where ideas are explored and shared with others, as the learning style closest to their own. Regular admits were somewhat more likely (29%) than preferred admits (19%) to respond to highly structured courses, while preferred admits were more likely (43%) than regular admits (33%) to like to study alone and focus on personally relevant material. Three percent ($n = 5$) of the regular admits and no preferred admits claimed that none of the learning styles described them because they felt burned out as students and didn't care to work with faculty or other students.

F. UNIVERSITY ASSESSMENT: BLACK GROUP

Grade point averages

For four years, the average GPAs of preferred admits were higher than for regular admits. However, there was a steady increase over the semesters in the average GPAs of regular admits (from an average of 1.7 in their first semester, to one of 2.3 in the spring semester of their fourth year), while those of preferred admits remained fairly steady (ranging between 2.3 and 2.6).

Academic action

For the first two semesters, a significantly greater proportion of regular admits than preferred admits had academic action (e.g., being put on probation or being academically dismissed) taken against them. Thirteen percent of the preferred admits and 36% of the regular admits were put on probation as a result of their first semester at UMCP. Three percent of the preferred admits and 20% of the regular admits were academically dismissed after their second semester. After the first year, however, the differences between preferred and regular admits on academic action were no longer statistically significant (see Table 3).

TABLE 3
Proportion of Black Group
With Academic Action Taken by Semester

	Preferred Admits	Regular Admits
Fall 1980		
probation	13	36
dismissal	—	—
Spring 1981		
probation	16	20
dismissal	3	20
Fall 1981		
probation	10	21
dismissal	7	9
Spring 1982		
probation	11	23
dismissal	4	9
Fall 1982		
probation	19	24
dismissal	0	11
Spring 1983		
probation	4	16
dismissal	8	12
Fall 1983		
probation	13	22
dismissal	4	7
Spring 1984		
probation	4	13
dismissal	0	6

Discrepancy between credit hours attempted and earned

One of the ways by which one's progression through the degree program is slowed is by ending a semester with fewer credits earned than attempted. To see if there were differences between preferred and regular admits in this regard, discrepancies between credits attempted and earned were examined for each semester. For the first four years of study, in every semester except the spring semester of the third year, a greater proportion of regular admits than preferred admits had discrepancies between credits attempted and earned. However, for both groups, the number of students with discrepancies decreased over time.

Enrollment patterns

The information in the following table depicts the yearly enrollment status (as of the time of each spring's data collection period) of preferred and regular admits. The information relies on both self-reported data and, where necessary, institutional data. Therefore there are no UMCP persisters included among participants categorized as "enrollment status unknown." This category consists of initial study participants who left both the study and UMCP and hence were not tracked either as part of MLS or in the institutional data set.

Acknowledging that the actual enrollment status of subjects categorized as "enrollment status unknown" would increase the percentages of transfers and non-students, certain observations can be made about the differential enrollment patterns for preferred and regular admits in the Black Group. The proportion of preferred admits who persisted at UMCP was significantly higher than for regular admits, while the proportion of regular admits who transferred elsewhere was greater than for preferred admits. There were more non-students among regular admits, as well.

G. GRADUATION RATES FROM UMCP: BLACK GROUP

Using institutional data to examine graduation rates from UMCP for preferred and regular admits reveals that there were significant differences between preferred and regular admits on graduation rates from UMCP. **Eighteen of the 31 preferred admits in the Black Group, or 58%, graduated from UMCP within six years of matriculation.** Sixty-one percent of those had graduated after four years, another 22% after five years, and 17% after six years.

Of the 282 regular admits in the Black Group, 70, or 25%, had graduated from UMCP within six years of matriculation. Of those who graduated, 52% did so after four years, 42% after five years, and 6% after six years.

TABLE 4
Enrollment Patterns*
of Preferred Admits and Regular Admits
in the Black Group
(in percentages)

	1982		1983		1984		1985	
	Preferred Admit	Regular Admit	Preferred Admit	Regular Admit	Preferred Admit	Regular Admit	Preferred Admit	Regular Admit
UMCP Persister/Grad	90	61	84	49	74	45	66	37
Transferred elsewhere	0	21	3	21	6	20	3	14
Not enrolled in higher education	6	11	6	11	10	12	6	10
Enrollment status unknown	3	7	6	18	10	23	25	39

* as of the spring semester data collection, which was prior to that year's May graduation.

III. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this report was to examine how students who have demonstrated high scholastic aptitude and exceptional high school academic performance fare at The University of Maryland College Park and to see if aspects of their academic experience are measurably different from those of the average UMCP student.

Before discussing some of the differences between preferred and regular admits, however, there were some commonalities which should be highlighted. First, **there was a tendency for students in academic jeopardy not to seek tutoring.** The expectation that students in need of tutoring or other academic support services will seek those services is a faulty expectation. Only thirty percent of the students in the Representative Group who were placed on academic probation as a result of their first semester at UMCP reported having sought help from tutoring services. Forty-two percent of the students in the Black Group on probation as a result of their first semester here reported having sought tutoring. Perhaps this reluctance to seek help with academic work reflects an often unrealistic tendency for students to think they can improve academically on their own, when in fact they could make greater gains with help from a tutor in clarifying their understanding of the material or in changing their style of studying. In the Black Group it was students who prefer structure who were most likely to seek tutoring. Students with other learning styles, even when they had been placed on probation, were not as likely to seek tutoring. Members of the University community who offer academic support services to students need to consider ways of breaking through the reluctance of many students in need of academic support to seek it. Further, they need to be aware that help-seeking behavior can be related to factors such as learning style, and accommodate different learning styles both in making their services known and in their direct service with students needing academic support.

A second commonality among the students studied for this report was that, **regardless of aptitude and high school academic performance, there seemed to be a tendency toward unrealistic expectations among students both in the Representative Group and in the Black Group whose educational goals at the time of their freshman year involved going on to professional school after earning the baccalaureate.** The grade point averages for these students were lower than for students planning to stop at the baccalaureate degree. (In the Black Group, this was true of Ph.D. aspirants as well, as observation which should not go unnoticed by educators concerned about the low proportion of black students in doctoral programs.) The fact that a sizeable majority of the students studied had decided on their academic major before matriculation at UMCP, combined with the evidence that students wanting to go to professional school tended to earn grades, particularly their freshman year, which are not conducive to acceptance at professional school, highlights the importance of personalized and realistic advising of students during their first year of college as well as at the high school level.

The data presented here reveal patterns in the variables concerning the academic experience of students at UMCP. These patterns emerge during the freshman year and gain in strength of relationship over time. They hold for students in the Representative Group and in the Black Group.

One pattern concerns faculty-student interaction. At one end of the continuum are students who receive oral and written feedback from faculty on their work, who spend some time in personal contact with faculty members, and who feel they have become enough acquainted with a faculty member to receive a useful letter of recommendation from them. At the other end of the continuum are students who feel they are not getting the feedback they need from faculty, and do not feel connected with faculty. Students who begin their college careers lacking such feedback appear not to make up lost ground. On the other hand, students who report having adequate personal contact and feedback from faculty in their freshman year appear to maintain it over time. Retention studies suggest that student/faculty interaction is a significant intervening variable in students' involvement in their academic experience, which is correlated with student persistence. Faculty and students both should feel encouraged to take the initiative in developing out-of-classroom contact.

Another pattern which emerges in the freshman year and increases in strength over time relates to students' commitment to learning. Students who see positive development in their commitment to learning in their first year tend to continue to see positive gains over time. Conversely, there is a correlation between low perceived gains in commitment to learning during the first year, and low gains in the second and third years. Consequently, these data again suggest the importance of the freshman year not only in the process of integrating the student into the academic community but also in creating a mind set responsive to the main mission of the institution: excitement about and commitment to learning.

Not surprisingly, there seems to be a relationship between these two patterns, of faculty-student contact and students' commitment to learning. Students who see positive gains in their commitment to learning are those who have sustained positive interactions with faculty members. Conversely, students who see little or no gain in their commitment to learning over time are those who also report minimal faculty feedback and contact over time. What is surprising, however, is that our data suggest **there is a larger proportion of this latter type of student among preferred admits than among regular admits.** In other words, a large proportion of preferred admits in their third year at UMCP were showing signs of disengagement with the academic experience.

What is particularly disturbing is that the very type of student UMCP is trying to attract—those with exceptional admissions qualifications—appeared to be most vulnerable to an increasing disaffection with the academic process. **Despite these students' ability to earn and maintain a grade point average high enough to be retained at and to graduate from UMCP, they appeared not to benefit fully from the educational opportunity afforded them by admission to UMCP.**

Using standard criteria of academic success such as college GPA, preferred admits are academic successes. Their academic performance each semester is significantly better in both the Representative and Black Groups than that of regular admits. Preferred admits are also more likely than regular admits to be able to complete the academic credits they attempt. Finally, preferred admits in the Black Group were twice as likely as regular admits to graduate from UMCP. Thus by these criteria the academic experience of the type of students UMCP seeks looks positive. However, considering the academic experience as more than the accumulation of college credits and an eventual diploma, the data presented in this report may be cause for serious thought.

If one mission of an institution of higher education is facilitating the development of intellectual curiosity, skills, and a commitment to lifelong learning, there may be some doubt that UMCP has been fulfilling its mission—particularly for its more talented student. Synthesizing some of the findings outlined in this report suggests that students with high scholastic aptitude and exceptional high school academic performance may not be challenged sufficiently by the academic environment or engaged in a personal way that is the basis of continued, self-motivated intellectual development. The preferred admits studied for this report indicated that, while they rated themselves above their peers on most intellectual skills, by their third year in college they did less preparation (reading) for course work and they identified little gain in their commitment to learning compared to when they matriculated at UMCP. Thus, while these students outperformed their regular admit counterparts, they did not appear to be making the commitment to the 'life of the mind' that most professionals in higher education value as an outcome of attending college.

Astin (1984) believes that the extent to which students can achieve particular educational goals is a direct function of the degree of physical and psychological energy devoted to the activities designed to produce these gains. In other words, students who are not actively involved in the learning process, regardless of their aptitude and abilities, are not as likely as students who actively participate in the academic experience to achieve developmental goals typically associated with the college experience. Thus the data presented here are congruent with Astin's theory of involvement: if students are less involved in the academic experience, they make fewer intellectual gains and will also likely be less satisfied with their college experience as a whole.

Indeed, a major thrust of the recommendations outlined in the recent report prepared by the College Park Campus Senate Ad Hoc Committee on Undergraduate Education, chaired by John Pease—Promises to Keep: The College Park Plan for Undergraduate Education—is to increase the active involvement of

students in the learning process. Both "College Park Seminars" offered in the freshman year, and "capstone courses" offered to seniors may be viewed as ways of breaking down the typical large lecture class into a small enough environment to encourage increased student involvement and participation. The Pease report recognizes that "close contact with full-time faculty in their first year will help students find their intellectual, social, moral, and personal bearings on this large campus" (p. 23). Further, the report sees a compelling need to introduce students to the intellectual expectations of this campus and to deepen the intellectual experience of all beginning students in their first year. What the Pease report has determined largely from faculty and administrative input and observation is documented from the student perspective by MLS data presented in the present report.

The Pease report also calls for faculty to "set high standards and develop rigorous learning experiences" (p. x) and to create a more intellectually stimulating and supportive learning environment for undergraduates on this campus. Again, the MLS data appear consistent with this recommendation. By their third year in college, many of UMCP's brighter students are finding fault with their academic experience.

In conclusion, as the University moves forward with increasingly selective admissions, more of the undergraduate student body will resemble the preferred admits described in the present report. This is a population the University seeks not only to admit but also to educate successfully. This report has provided empirical support that these students may need to become more involved in the academic life of the University. The recommendations dealing with increasing students' active participation in the learning process and with strategies to increase faculty-student interactions outlined in the Pease report are consistent with the empirical evidence gathered from students as part of the Maryland Longitudinal Study. If implemented, the recommendations should be successful in sponsoring the intellectual development, the commitment to learning, and appreciation most educators value as outcomes of each student's investment in college.

END NOTE

1. A review of these students' admissions information suggests that these students may have misinterpreted the question about type of high school curriculum. The question read:

From which type of high school curriculum were you most recently graduated: 1) Public high school/College Academic course; 2) Public high school/Commercial course; 3) Public high school/General course; 4) Parochial high school; 5) Private (non-parochial) high school; 6) Other.

Admissions records indicate that nearly every student who reported they had graduated from a "General course" were in fact in an academic track. Students may have interpreted "College Academic course" as meaning advanced placement.

REFERENCES

- Astin, A. W. (1984). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 25, 297-308.
- College Park Campus Senate Ad Hoc Committee on Undergraduate Education. (1987, September 14). *Promises to keep: The College Park plan for undergraduate education*. The University of Maryland College Park.

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